



NABO News

The Magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners
Issue 2 April 2024



**Liveaboard Boater
Wellbeing**

**Disaster on the
Llangollen Canal
Averted**

**Fund Britain's
Waterways Campaign**



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The magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners

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NABO Calender 2024

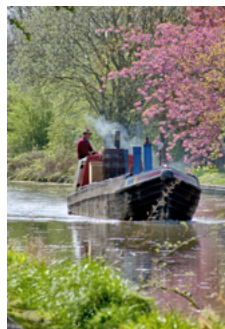
The Council meetings in 2024 will be on:
6th April 2024 by Zoom, 18th May 2024 at Tamworth Cruising Club, 13th July 2024 Zoom, 14th September 2024 Zoom, 16th November 2024 after AGM at Tamworth Cruising Club

Next NABO News copy date

Articles, letters, photos and cartoons are most welcome. Please email your contributions to nabonews@nabo.org.uk or post to the Editor by May 11th 2024.

Cover photo

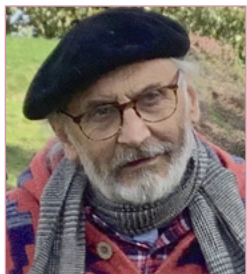
This month's cover shows Roger Fuller on historic narrow boat Clematis heading along the Shropshire Union Canal towards Ellesmere Port. © Photo by Kev Maslin. Please email your photos for the front cover of NABO News to the Editor, as JPEG attachments, ideally portrait format with a file size of 2MB or larger.



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For anyone who read last month's editorial it seems I might have put too much trust in the veracity of information published. A letter by Iain Street correcting some of the misconceptions is published in the letters section.

It's no surprise as I'm writing, accompanied by the gentle patter of rain, that the records for temperature and rainfall have been

ings when RHDl has suffered the biggest drop since records began in 1956-7. Those people unfortunate enough to have a house as well as a boat have double the expense and above inflation increases in council tax to fund. The net effect is most likely to be an increase in the number of boat dwellers (ie those not continuous cruising) and the very well off weekend cruisers. Middle income boating families will become more likely to hire in season and not own a boat at all.

Money, Money, Money

Editor **John Sadler** on funding

re-written this winter. Science and statistics confirm that this is a pattern which it's likely will be repeated and worsen as climate change continues. This will affect CRT and the amount of funding it needs to keep canals open. Our politicians are giving flood issues more attention as is to be expected in an election year.

Beyond the election we need to get some sensible plans in place that pull together local government, the navigation authorities and central government, to provide infrastructure guidance and funding.

The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) has stated that the Real Household Disposable Income (RHDI) fell by 4.3% in 2022-3 followed by a further drop of 2.8% in 2023-4. We are expected to replace our heating systems and engines with more expensive green alternatives, which cost more to run, and pay more for our licence and moor-

The response to Covid can be highlighted as a significant reason for the decline in available funding; £37 billion spent on two years of track and trace, £13.1 bn procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), self-employed income support £122 bn and furlough schemes £70 bn. This month, the OBR estimated that the total cost of "pandemic-related support measures" would total £311bn. That, at least, is a significant decline on its estimate a year ago of £346 bn. The fiscal year 2020-21 was the first one in which government spending in the UK surpassed a trillion pounds, reaching £1096 bn.

Whilst the Government bean counters may not realise what we've got till it's gone, it does go some way to explain why there is a lack of funding for the canal network.

However it does make it even more important to spend the limited funding wisely. The only way we can witness suitable expenditure is to have more transparency and understanding. We shouldn't have to raise Freedom of Information questions for key statistics, it wastes time, when a disclosure could have avoided any cries of obfuscation and mistrust.

Spring is on its way, hopefully the rain will stop and the summer will make us all feel happier.



Such is the lot of a chairperson as the calendar fills with some face to face but mainly online meetings these days. Convenient if chancy with the capricious wifi at our mooring, they remain a great way to maintain NABO's reputation for keeping current boater issues on the agendas of those who need to be involved. Here are a few items of note from our meetings as well as others that have been publicised.

Our regular meeting with Matthew Symonds of CRT revealed that they expect the next Boater Satisfaction survey to not give any better results than the last one but there were no suggestions as to ideas CRT were thinking of trying to improve on this. The ever decreasing facilities that may well feed in to this was discussed with ideas to prevent fly tipping from NABO dismissed as too expensive or simply wouldn't work. Surely with boaters' and the environment's welfare at heart, where there's a will? There will however be additional collections from the refuse areas that remain 'if necessary' and there's some possible good news on new sites found at Stone and Leeds. The issues at Bathampton on the K&A remain unresolved, CRT stating that this closure is not to save money but because of fly tipping. Presumably other bin removals also do not save CRT money, not just this one, so isn't it disingenuous when CRT say that this is the reason?

Funding issues included the success of fundraising which apparently has now attracted over 40,000 Friends, with a high proportion of those being boaters. The oft promised fundraising strategy will now possibly put in an appearance during spring or summer. In the meantime, wealthy donors are being targetted with £2.9m invested to grow dona-

tions with the benefits being seen in the next five years. This at least will be a change from targetting boaters, the continuous cruiser surcharge item being brushed away with the terse comment "look at the FAQ's".

The possible closure of canals followed naturally on from the funding issues. No specific canals having been identified to be at risk, rather that, in the future, if a large problem occurs for which there are no



A Month of Meetings.

Chair **Anne Husar**

reserve funds to fix, this will then lead to closure. Jeopardy all over the system.

Remembering the many vegetation issues from last year, the question was asked, what will change to improve things for boating this year. Well, some contracts have been renewed, some cancelled, some new ones made but there will be more reliance on volunteers performing this role. The recent West Midlands CRT forum mentioned 614 trees had been dealt with in their region alone, 400 of these cleared by volunteers. Maybe it's time for us all to equip our boats with some useful gardening tools before we set out?

NABO had previously arranged for CRT's dredging programme to be publicised on their website to give a warning to boaters but this was nowhere to be found. It will be chased up, as will lengthy angling matches that we asked to be notified as an 'advice' notice in the stoppages. Dredging was also mentioned at the West Mids Forum; out of a £10m maintenance budget set for this year, £0.45m was all that had been allocated for a bit of spot dredging near Walsall. Rather hoping this isn't reflected all over the system.

I feel we could benefit from a BBC type fact checking service when reading the report of CRT's recent meeting at Westminster. CRT state that around 60 people turned up to listen, some were MP's but the rest were members of the House of Lords and others from 'partner organisations' so, in fact, not many MP's from the 650 in the House.

But it's these incredible 'well-being' figures in the 'illions, for example the billions of pounds of economic benefits, the 888 million people apparently using the tow-paths or the £1.1 billion of savings in NHS costs, that assuredly raise eyebrows whenever they are used?

Surely credibility is important when a case is being made for more funding from the government?

Certainly CRT credibility is needed when Fund Britain's Waterways are out there campaigning for more government financial help. The movement has now over 120 member organisations and over 50,000 signatures on the petition to present to Westminster in May. Shortcomings in waterway management can be identified in all the navigation authorities involved across the UK but without adequate funding, we could lose what is so precious to all of us.



Yet Another Meeting

Anne Husar was invited as a representative of NABO to attend a meeting on the 15th February 2024 following the flooding caused by the Rudyard reservoir over topping in January. It was a lively one with farmers, CRT and Severn Trent Water among the participants.

The story is that because CRT have not maintained the two feeders for many years and didn't replace the full time reservoir manager, farmers fields flooded unnecessarily, with cattle having to be moved in an emergency, feed stuff wasted and no warnings given. Almost felt sorry for the three CRT representatives. They had to try to placate but have so alienated the farmers that they have not given the permission CRT need to get machinery over their land to do any maintenance. WRG have of-

fered but CRT have not given them permission. In response to the 'lack of funds' stock answer from CRT the MP at the meeting suggested lottery funding.

Severn Trent, as well as managing the GU Water Movement programme that is now underway is also looking at taking water from this reservoir too. Anne asked about priorities if the Caldon Canal runs dry in a drought. An unconvincing answer from CRT claimed that boaters considerations would be a high one but there will be a consultation.....

There was a debate in the Commons on the subject of flooding. George Freeman, Con, Mid Norfolk suggested that in the past 10 years there has been an extremely high rate of flooding. In 2020, 200 houses were flooded with sew-

age; two months ago, 100 houses in Attleborough were affected. This situation is getting worse and worse. It is partly climate change, yes, but also house dumping and inappropriate investment in infrastructure. As well as a national strategy, we need to ensure that in such counties, where 38 agencies have responsibility, somebody has to be held to account to avoid the flooding incidents.

Laurence Robertson, Con Tewkesbury, stated schemes have been put in place and grants have been made available to people who have been flooded—homeowners, businesses and farmers—and that is welcome, as is the further compensation that some people can claim. Claiming tends to be a rather cumbersome exercise, however, with professional help required to access it. Sarah Dyke, Lib Dem, Somerton and Frome, suggested that the Government must urgently provide access to that scheme so that [people] can make their properties more resilient against floods. Laurence Robertson agreed that was a very good point. Making it available is one thing; enabling people to access it is something else. Several MPs quoted that flooding in their constituency had been exacerbated by the building of new housing. To summarise the situation, The Environment Agency has responsibility for drawing up maps and identifying flood plains, but that system is not working and has not worked for a long time, mainly because it does not take water displacement into account. In other words, it is not just about whether the new houses that are being built flood, but whether building on those fields will cause existing properties to flood. As well as deploying property flood resil-

ience measures, there should be a detailed consideration of whether sustainable urban drainage systems, for example, work, and if they do, at what threshold they should be extended.

We need to have a clear policy in place with regard to new buildings. Should they be able to tap into existing drainage systems, or should there be a threshold beyond which they need to ensure that extra drainage capacity is in place before building commences? That is a point that was raised with the then Prime Minister in 2021-22. It is not just about large-scale developments; sometimes building an extra house here or there can, over time, cause problems for others in the area. Making sure that watercourses are clear obviously helps to reduce the risk of flooding. Councils have a responsibility to ensure that riparian owners carry out the correct amount of work, but this is not always the case.

One of the arguments made against dredging—as it is on the Government’s website—is that clearing one part of a river just pushes the water downstream, but the logical conclusion to that argument would be to say that we should never place flood defences anywhere, which is obviously not the case. Rather, it is one good reason that we need both national and local approaches to the problem. For example, looking at the River Severn as a whole, it could be concluded that the whole river needs dredging so that the water can be moved out to the sea as quickly as possible. Dredging is controversial, but we need to have an informed conversation about its benefits, and proper analysis carried out by the Government and the Environment Agency.



Liveaboard Boater Wellbeing

Vice-chair **Rob Neff**

Health outcomes for full time boaters have never been great, whether it be for the original boaters transporting goods in the 1800s and the first half of the 1900s, or for modern boaters.

It's not the outdoor lifestyle and the exercise that comes with moving, replenishing and maintaining, but the constant change from location to location, leading to poor

ing less healthy lifestyle choices. Mental health can also suffer, the frequent moving interrupting friendships with fellow boaters, non-boaters not understanding or appreciating your lifestyle, the long winter nights spent in a cozy but perhaps confined and isolating space, the prevalence of many boaters living on their own, the seemingly temporary nature of life, all contribute to challenges not faced by leisure boaters and bricks and mortar dwellers.

Is the freewheeling liveaboard lifestyle compatible with keeping doctor and dentist appointments for checkups, maintaining good contact with friends and family, having regular access to good inexpensive fresh food, limiting alcohol intake? For many, boating is all about being free, free of obligation, free of expectations, free of ties, but like all things in life, it needs a balance. We'd all like to be free of dentists and doctors but can't. CCers face the greatest challenges and boaters on residential moorings the least in this context but it's important that all boaters demand access to healthcare services.

access to medical care, interrupted education, worse access to shops for fresh food, as well as the obstacles placed by the healthcare providers and local councils to receiving health care and access to services as well as benefits, etc.

Boater life breaks many taboos. Smoking? Yes, many of us do. Going to the pub often? Where else can we socialise? Once the break is made of living outside the norm, it is much easier to break other conventions, conventions both good and bad.

Living outside the box of bricks and mortar makes access to healthcare more difficult and can lead to many boaters adopting and sustain-



Making life better by water. CRT's contribution to boater wellbeing?

An NHS advertisement with a blue background. At the top left, it says 'Everyone is welcome in general practice' in white and yellow text. The NHS logo is in the top right. A hand holds a yellow card with the text: 'I have the right to register and receive treatment from a GP practice. I do not need a fixed address. I do not need identification. Anyone in England can see a GP.' A blue 'OPEN' sign is in the center. At the bottom right, it says 'Find out more www.nhs.uk/register' with a white mouse cursor arrow pointing to the URL.

Boaters Reps Meeting

Report from Customer Service Facilities (CSF) sub-group, 12 February 2024

by **Helen Hutt**

A new pump-out system has been rolled out successfully across the network, and is providing useful data on usage. No serious problems reported so far.

The toilets that have already closed and not required by volunteers or to meet CSF standards will not re-open.

Facilities likely to close permanently include Tyrley, on the Shropshire Union, (flooding/cracked septic tank), covered by Market Drayton and Norbury, 4.5 hours cruising distance; Camp Hill, GU, vulnerable site, will cost £40K to repair, CRT looking for alternative site; Govilon, Mon & Brec, other CSFs available.

CRT looking at possibility of some services

being taken over by waterside moorers.

Water points in general are unaffected. Problem of water pressure at some existing sites is unlikely to be resolved but where new points are installed this would be addressed.

Better liaison is required with developers undertaking to install facilities. Eg Loughborough, which has very difficult access.

Rubbish in Wales – a new law from April requires five recycling bins at each site therefore larger compounds may be needed in some locations.

A communication programme to boaters will be drawn up by the end of February.



This is No April Fool's Joke

Although it came as quite a surprise, even to members of the Boat Safety committee, a Boat Safety Scheme Limited company has been set up. The Canal & River Trust, Environment Agency, Broads Authority, and the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities are announcing some governance changes to the Boat Safety Scheme which will see it become a not-for-profit company. A decision presumably made without reference to the EA's continuing work with national stakeholders, and the benefits of a new engagement model. (See later Article).

As a company limited by guarantee, Boat Safety Scheme Limited has been incorporated to take on the work of the existing Scheme from 1 April 2024.

The Scheme's structure remains unchanged, with all income re-

turned into the running costs and continuing the safety improvements brought about by the Scheme since its inception in 1995.

Boating customers of the various navigation and harbour authorities won't see any change to their existing BSS Certification or boat licence/registration processes because of these changes. The current Boat Safety Standards will continue to apply in the same form - with current BSS Certificates remaining valid until their existing renewal date.

Boat Safety Scheme Limited will also continue to regulate the training and accreditation of BSS Examiners in the same way as the current Scheme.

The governance changes will bring greater transparency on decision-making and clarify relationships between the existing stakeholders.

You'll be able to find further information including Q&As on the BSS web pages www.boatsafetyscheme.org

If you have any enquiries about the changes, you should email them to bss.enquiries@boatsafetyscheme.org

Disaster on the Llangollen Canal Averted

by **Andy Williams**, boater

Boaters on the Llangollen Canal have been following with close interest, not to mention concern, reports surrounding a near-breach of an offside embankment where the canal approaches the upstream edge of Whixall and Bettisfield Mosses. This is a look at the incident and how events unravelled.

On the evening of the 5th March at about 6 pm, the CaRT emergency response team at Ellesmere received a call describing what turned out to be a major leak through the offside canal embankment just downstream of Bridge 47 on the Llangollen Canal. It was from the owner of the nearby house, and he spoke of water exiting the embankment “pissing like a hydrant”. From the location given it was clear that it was essentially the same site as a previous breach some years earlier. Ironically that was in some sense ‘positive’ as the general characteristics of the location were

thus already well known. Within the hour the nearest CaRT emergency response team members were on site with members of the regional team from centres further away arriving shortly after.

From then on things moved quickly. A round hole about 18 inches/50 cm across was readily visible in the bed of the canal, and through it water was draining out into the surrounding area via abandoned badger sett tunnels. The risk of an imminent breach was quickly assessed as real. Fortunately as a part of the remedial treatment associated with the previous breach (also associated with badgers) the bank had been netted to reinforce it and the local vegetation had also since grown in, so the bank was holding. Nevertheless the situation was considered precarious. By about 2 am the following morning the maintenance barge at Whitchurch was being loaded with ‘first response’ materials (heavy duty plastic sheeting etc) and was ready to make its way upstream.

Once the flow had been significantly reduced using heavy plastic sheeting across the canal bed and hole, over the following days the canal bed was further sealed and stabilised with more sheeting and 30 tonnes or so of bagged stone placed so as to both hold the sheeting and strengthen the offside bank. However the leakage wasn’t and still isn’t totally stopped. It’s still weeping significantly at the base of the embankment, vigilance and surveil-



lance is ongoing.

The present situation is that the success of these initial works to stabilise the area means that water can continue to flow along the canal and that boats can be assisted across the damaged zone, coasting in neutral in order to avoid disrupting the sheeting, all the while guided by a member of the CaRT team holding a centre line.

Remedial working will require well-considered operations. The embankment here is several metres high and was originally constructed from local glacial sand deposits so is fragile. It's made even more fragile by the various badger incursions. On top of that it's now wet and soft with a real risk of further slumping. Consequently it's not prudent to go straight into driving in heavy duty piling because until the ground is stabilised the vibration from the pile driver could provoke a collapse. Piling will be complemented by grouting to fill voids. The trouble once again will be the badger tunnels. If you don't survey and potentially back-fill the tunnels beforehand any grout pumped in risks running through and between the tunnels and leaking ineffectively out of the bankside sett exits.

The challenges don't stop there. The nature of the permanent works will require that section of the canal to be emptied. Unfortunately the Llangollen Canal doesn't just float boats, it also delivers water to Hurlleston Reservoir. That reservoir serves Crewe and area with drinking water, and represents a 'reserve' of no more than 4-5 days. Flow must therefore be assured, and in this location that means installing a water bypass system capable of ensuring a flow of 10-12 million gallons per day. It's also appropriate to minimise disruption to boat traffic given that the 'Gollie' is a very popular venue



for all types of boater. Then there are the fish to rescue ...

Given the time needed for piling and grouting the envisaged intermediate stage is to build a coffer dam out from the bank to isolate the damaged section of bank and bed while leaving a navigable width of about 4m of canal for boats and water supply to pass. This work is considered to be urgent.

The initial failure occurred despite that stretch of bank having been inspected about 10 days previously. It may well have led to a breach if it hadn't been spotted and responded to with urgency. Kudos is due to all involved.

Energy Compensation is still being pursued

For more information please contact Alex on alex@devizesanddistrict.foodbank.org.uk

Please add your signature to the petition you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/get-vital-ps600-energy-bill-support-to-remaining-off-grid-households-currently-excluded-from-support

The newly-named campaign group, UK Boaters for Energy Justice, are continuing their campaign to make sure all boating households get historical energy bill support worth £600, which other households received in 2022-23.

This campaign has been ongoing since a meeting with the MP for Devizes, Danny Kruger, at Caen Hill Marina in June 2023. Mr Kruger heard from both continuous cruisers and people at non-residential moorings about the impacts of being excluded from this support, which at the time was only being given to the minority of people across the UK with a residential mooring (only 3000 received this £600 payment in the UK, excluding Northern Ireland).

Since then, the group has grown from Wiltshire to cover other areas of the UK, including Oxfordshire and Shropshire, and has continued to lobby the Government, perhaps contributing to the decision to launch the £600 scheme for continuous cruisers in the late summer of 2023.

There are still boaters who aren't

eligible for this support, in a variety of situations. Some are unable to continuously cruise for health reasons, but can't access a residential mooring, so are moored at marinas for part of the year. Some have experienced bereavement so are given leeway to stay at their non-residential mooring, and some have moorings through employment which aren't residential. They might be paying steep mooring fees and can't necessarily challenge these due to the precarity of their mooring situation.

Whatever the reasons, these households deserve the same support as every other household has been offered. This will be a tiny cost to the Government, yet a significant benefit to recipients facing increased living costs. We've launched a petition to this end, which you can sign here. Every signature counts, so please add yours!

We're also looking to grow our campaigns team, because the more voices calling for energy justice, the more likely there'll be change. We need members to share posters and leaflets, speak to their friends, or meet with the Government ministers in May this year when the petition is handed in. You can get in touch on ukboatersforenergyjustice@gmail.com or 07483 377346.

This isn't just about a one-off support scheme, it's about the challenges faced by people who live slightly different lives and don't fit neatly into boxes, and challenging the Government to listen to these groups when making their plans and policies.



Climate Change

We have all witnessed record breaking high temperatures and rainfall this winter and spring. Fields are water logged and further rainfall is draining into rivers and canals.

Where intensive livestock farming methods are in use there is a risk of antibiotics being washed into waterways and encouraging the formation of antibiotic resistant bacteria. A question was asked by Virginia Crosbie, (Con. Ynys Môn), of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate he has made of the presence of antibiotic resistant bacteria in waterways. Robbie Moore, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State responded that Defra has been working with the Environment Agency (EA), the UK Health Security Agency, and others, to trial methods for detecting and quantifying antibiotic resistant bacteria in three river catchments in England as part of the PATHSAFE programme. The work involved sampling river water at sites along the length of each river subjected to different land uses and potential sources of resistant bacteria. The EA has already published some of the preparatory aspects and will publish further reports soon.

The answer only referred to river contamination but couldn't this also be present in canals?



Theft from the National Waterways Museum

Sometime between 9 and 12 February, eleven exhibits were stolen from the National Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port. The museum is working with the police and have temporarily closed the Island Warehouse within the museum where many smaller objects from their collection are displayed, and where the theft occurred, whilst a security review is completed. The items stolen include a model boat along with several small model engines and three large 'Tilly' lamps.

Whilst a closure of part of the museum is disappointing for visitors, it is hoped that people will appreciate how serious such a theft is and the importance of the investigation and security review currently taking place.

Travel Statistics

By Sue Tonius

A look at some illuminating figures.

I've just read that an experienced leisure boater of many years' cruising on the canals has allowed six weeks for a two week cruise while planning this year's travels. Realistic approach or over pessimistic? Maybe he's seen these stats for stoppages on the Leeds and Liverpool over time.

In 2016, this canal was open 'end to end' for 220 days, 2023 achieved just 118 days.

During the summer and autumn of 2016 (1/4 to 31/10), 24 days were lost to stoppages. For the same period in 2023 the canal, or should I say boaters, suffered 105 days with 57 days at Wigan alone.

Out of interest, I had a look at some more 'southerly' canal stats. for that same summer/autumn period. It didn't take me long to log those on the Coventry for there were none in both years! The Oxford wasn't too bad either with just 10 days in 2016 and 17 days last year.

I'm not sure what boaters can gain from this look back to past stoppages though as unforeseen leaks and landslips seem to be blighting the system as I type. Maybe the 6:2 ratio is about right.

Holding 90% of the UK's inland waterways collection, including some 15,000 objects and more than 50 boats, the National Waterways Museum is much-loved and tells a unique story. The museum had recently carried out a significant exercise cataloguing their collection, so were able to identify quickly which items were missing.

If you have any information about the theft, please speak to the police or contact the museum directly at the National Waterways Museum.



Lies, Damned Lies and Statistics

A closer look at the 2023 Lockage Report by **Nick Roberts**, Chairman of Trentlink

This is an in depth look at how the report, in particular the ranking of regions is presently done by CRT and how using the statistics from previous years can identify longer term trends.

Comparing apples with pears?

There are great inconsistencies in the sampled lock types in each region. Over 80% of West Midlands locks are narrow and they have no commercial locks while in the Yorkshire and North East (YNE) region some 50% of reporting locks are commercial and only 15% are narrow. Further the number of locks used in each region is not balanced either with the West Midlands based on potentially 56 locks while Wales and the South West on just 17 locks.

Table 1:

Regions comparison lock types
(measured but not used)

	Narrow Lock %		Wide Lock %		Commercial Lock %
West Midlands	30 (46)	83 (84)	6 (9)	17 (16)	0 (0)
East Midlands	4 (4)	(29 (17)	10 (12)	71 (52)	0 (7)
Wales & South West	2 (2)	15 (12)	9 (13)	69 (77)	2 (0)
London & South East	11 (11)	50 (41)	11 (15)	50 (56)	0 (1)
North West	12 (15)	43 (41)	16 (22)	57 (60)	0 (0)
Yourkshire & North East	5 (6)	15 (13)	10 (20)	29 (43)	19 (21)

Table 2:

Ranking of regions 2023

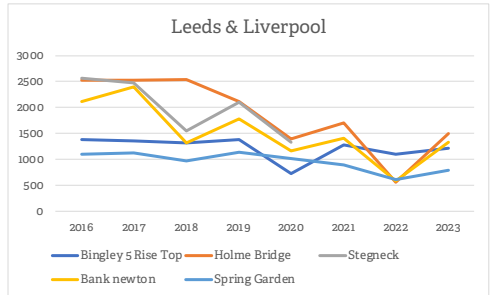
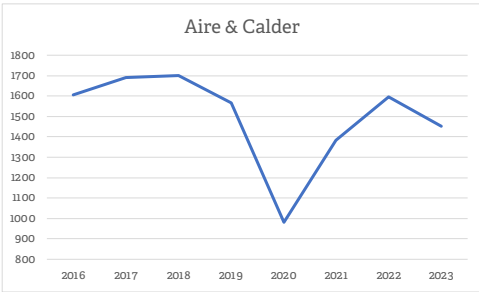
Comparing the numbers in this 2023 report with those of the 2017 report gives a very different pattern and highlights a drop of some 21% across all regions with London actually falling by 34% (despite big increases in boat numbers in that region) whereas YNE has fallen by 'only' 10%.

Average Lockage	2017	2023	% Change
West Midlands	3493	2946	-15.7
East Midlands	2865	2332	-18.6
Wales & South West	2643	2006	-24.1
London & South East	3010	1971	-34.5
North West	1926	1555	-19.3
Yorkshire & North East	1096	982	-10.4
Total	15,033	11,792	-21.6

By using all the lockage reports since 2016 for particular locks or waterways, graphics like these can be obtained, based on however many reference points you have.

The 'average' for the Aire & Calder showing a nearly 10% loss

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Leeds		2004	1634	1527	696	1080	1138	1033
Bulhome	1720	1748	1682	1659	1145	1277	1952	1633
Whitley				1620	1217	1251	1834	1693
Pollington			2008	1883	1382	911	1999	1938
Birkwood		1813	1814	1603	866	1382	1693	1574
Kings road Lock		1710	1729	1595	1023	1552	1506	1408
Knopstrop	1540	1696		1560	779	1470	1400	1182
Fishpond Lock				1314	910	1627	1338	1271
Woodlesford		1629	1637	1488	966	1693	1463	1457
Woodknock	1559	1645	1637	1488	862	1420	1597	1312
Lemonroyd		1281	1460	1474	955	1553	1640	1446
Average	1606	1691	1700	1566	982	1383	1596	1451



Although numbers have not been available throughout, a graphic can be constructed for the YNE region of the Leeds & Liverpool. This would seem to suggest a fall of around 38%.

Graph 1 & 2:
Aire & Calder
Leeds and Liverpool

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Bingley 5 Rise Top	1381	1353	1321	1379	724	1281	1095	1219
Holme Bridge	2524	2530	2544	2116	1392	1702	563	1498
Stegneck	2565	2474	1543	2102	1329			
Bank Newton	2108	2401	1311	1783	1162	1412	584	1326
Spring Garden	1102	1118	969	1134		896	610	786

Other northern waterways could be tracked in a similar way, with Sheffield and South Yorkshire one of the few that shows a small gain, apart from the Pocklington with an enormous increase of 238%! Surely though, this overall fall in lockage numbers while licensed boat numbers are increasing is truly a sign that canal usage is changing significantly? Where have all the cruising boats gone or is the system being increasingly used by those who moor more than move?

Bilges and Pumps

Advice from RCR

More information:
rivercanalrescue.co.uk

In the last issue, River Canal Rescue gave us some tips on de-winterising and servicing; now managing director, Stephanie Horton, is focusing on bilges and pumps. She says:

“Remove all waste from the bilges and give them a clean. This gives you a better chance of spotting any developing leaks or issues throughout the coming season and reduces the risk of contaminants being pumped into our waterways.

A bilge pump is a must – it keeps your vessel safe, so it’s important to have the right type of bilge pump and install it correctly. It has two potential roles; the first is well-known, to maintain a safe water ingress

level. The second is to work in an emergency situation, responding to a potential sinking event, giving you valuable time to react and hopefully save the vessel.

When choosing which pump system to use, be clear on the role you want it to perform. A maintenance pump manages small levels of water ingress consistently, so will need replacing after a few years due to its workload. As the ingress will be slow, it doesn’t need to pump large volumes of water, so a small automatic or manual pump is best from a cost and maintenance perspective.

Position a maintenance pump in an area where water ingress is likely or common, such as near the stern gland or directly under deck boards.

In contrast, an emergency pump acts as an early-warning system, evacuating larger amounts of water, slowing the impact of an incident. It should be in a fairly good condition and has to be automatic, due to needing to respond without prompting. A large automatic pump is the best option, and as it won’t operate for most of the time, it will remain in a good condition, ready for emergencies.

Position the emergency pump in an area most at risk of serious ingress and install it two-three inches higher than the maintenance pump (or where water would not be expected to reach). By making the outlet point as visible as possible, water being pumped overboard from this point will catch the eye and alert you to a serious issue.

There’s nothing in legislation making the installation of bilge

Oil on Water
 Photo: Blaine Cook



pumps mandatory, so they're not given the priority they deserve. We frequently find vessels without pumps and it's common to come across boats with only a maintenance pump.

The environmental risk is cited as the main reason behind this; a maintenance pump evacuates liquid that often includes oils, fuels, and other chemicals so the governing bodies would prefer people to manually 'mop out' their bilges daily and dispose of the contaminants responsibly. Our Bilgeaway filter uses a non-toxic solution to extract hydrocarbon contaminants (petrol, diesel, engine oil etc) from water and render them non-reactive, leaving environmentally-friendly contents in a cartridge which can be disposed of and the housing re-used.

Ideally vessels should have a maintenance and an emergency pump. At a minimum there should

be an emergency pump. If you use a single pump for maintenance, it will not perform an early-warning emergency role and may be incapable of giving you extra time in a serious incident."



Bilgeaway Filter
Photo: RCR

River Canal Rescue launches photography competition

River Canal Rescue (RCR) is calling on photography fans to send in their marine, river or canal-based pictures; 12 of which will be chosen to illustrate its 2025 calendar with any sales' profits donated to Cancer Research UK.

A panel of judges including RCR director Stephanie Horton, Canal Boat editor, Charlie Waters and Canal & River Trust communications manager, Damian Kemp, will scrutinise the entries, which, as long as they're water-based, can be anything from landscape scenes to wildlife images.

The competition runs until midnight, 31 May 2024 and multiple entries are

permitted. They must be original, in a high-resolution format, taken by the entrant, and accompanied with some background information, including a name, photo title, brief description of the image, and when and where it was taken.

RCR's calendars will be on sale from the end of August and every image received will feature in a video, released on YouTube and RCR's Facebook page, and potentially used in future promotional material, crediting the owner.

Photos should be emailed to rcrcompetition@gmail.com

Mentions in The House



Navendu Mishra

19 Feb 2024

In response to a question from Navendu Mishra, Labour, Stockport: How many of the 56 pollution discharges in the River Mersey resulted in action being taken in line with the Environment Agency's Enforcement and Sanctions policy?

Robbie Moore, Conservative, Keighley, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs written response:

Following the 56 pollution discharges into the River Mersey, in line with its enforcement and sanctions policy, the Environment Agency has taken action 24 times. Five pollution occurrences resulted in warning letters, 17 resulted in site warnings and two instances resulted in advice and guidance being issued.

After initial enquiries, the Environment Agency took no further action in 12 instances where no offence was deemed to have been committed, in eight instances that had no impact on water quality and in two instances where, following its enforcement and sanctions policy, further action was deemed not to be in the public interest.

There were 10 instances where a polluter could not be identified, so further action could not be taken.

In a Commons debate Philip Dunne Chair, Environmental Audit Committee,

Questioned if his Right Hon. Friend shared his enthusiasm about Monday's (26th Feb 2024) announcement of 27 new potential bathing water sites across the country, including three in Shropshire: two on the River Severn at Ironbridge and Shrewsbury, and one on the River Teme at Ludlow? How will those

very welcome designations improve the quality of rivers in Shropshire and in the other areas under consideration?

To which Rishi Sunak responded:

On Monday we launched a consultation on the largest ever roll-out of new bathing water sites: 27 potential new bathing waters in England, including an extra one on the River Teme in Ludlow in my Right Hon. Friend's constituency. He is right that substantial improvements have been made in recent years. Almost 90% of designated bathing waters in England now meet the higher standards of good or excellent, up from just 76% in 2010; all part of our plan for water [including] the strictest storm overflow targets and plans for unlimited penalties for polluting water companies.....

Greg Knight questioned the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he a) is taking and b) plans to take steps to support greater use of canals and waterways for tourism purposes?

Robbie Moore responded: Our inland waterways are an important national heritage asset delivering a wide range of public benefits. These include environmental 'green corridors' along which biodiversity can flourish, physical and mental health improvement, water stewardship, and recreational activities. I agree that they are valuable resources for tourism, providing pleasant active and sustainable travel routes for boating holidays and day trips.

Ministers do not have a role in operational matters on inland waterways. However, navigation authorities and local canal societies are able to work with their Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) or



Robbie Moore



Greg Knight

local Destination Management Organisation (DMO) to develop their tourism offer, including by accessing relevant funding.

Does this mean new funding for canals?

In a response worthy of Humphrey from Yes Minister fame:

The LVEP programme is part of a new national vision for England's tourism management landscape, as recommended by the independent DMO review. Destination Development Partnerships (DDPs) will set regional priorities for the visitor economy and receive government funding to focus on key objectives.

Currently DDPs are being piloted in two areas: the North East of England and the West Midlands. LVEPs work closely with VisitEngland, with ongoing support from a team of five new Regional Development Leads (RDLs). An important strand of support will be highlighting available Government funding streams as well as developing and providing a 'toolkit' to help LVEPs with bids to those streams.

Editor: Your guess is as good as mine!

Michael Fabricant, Con, Lichfield questioned the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will introduce National Planning Policy Guidance to assist local government planning authorities to provide a consistent approach to (a) canal and (b) associated infrastructure restoration.

The written response from Lee Rowley, Minister of State (Minister for Housing) The restoration of inland waterways are hugely important to so many communities around the country. Whilst we do not currently have plans to introduce further guidance, we will certainly keep the matter under review.

MPs Gathered to recognise the modern-day value of 250 year old canal network

Parliamentarians from both houses and partner organisations joined the Canal & River Trust at a reception at the Houses of Parliament on the 6 March 2024. Over 60 guests attended the cross-party event, part of the Keep Canals Alive campaign, which showcased how the canal network is helping Government tackle national challenges and deliver on key policy objectives.

The Trust illustrated how the country's extensive canal network can help society mitigate the effects of climate change, with a more resilient network providing sustainable transport routes into towns and cities, and delivering flood protection, water transfer opportunities, a supply of green energy, nature recovery and improved biodiversity.

Guests at the reception, hosted by Wendy Morton MP and Holly

The River Severn at Ironbridge



Lynch MP, also heard how the 250-year-old ageing canal network is increasingly threatened by extreme weather events and about the continued need for adequate funding and support for the Canal & River Trust in its mission to safeguard these waterways.

Introducing a newly published Impact Report - Transforming Places and Enriching Lives, the Trust said its 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England and Wales play a key part in the government's ambitions to improve access to nature, including the key policy of the population being within 15 minutes' walk of water and green space. The Impact Report also showcases the role that canals play in improving community wellbeing and tackling health inequalities, as well as supporting jobs, local economies, and nature recovery.

Robbie Moore MP, Defra Minister for Water and Rural Growth, told guests how the "Trust has gone from strength to strength in maintaining the vital waterway system", including a reference to the huge growth in volunteering. He also spoke about the role of canals in providing nature corridors and the government's policy objective of ensuring good quality green and blue spaces within 15 minutes' walk for all. He recognised that climate change is placing more strain on the canal network and that "as the Minister [responsible for inland waterways], the calls are heard loud and clear for funding to continue".

Toby Perkins MP, Shadow Minister for Nature and Rural Affairs, thanked the Trust as custodians of national treasures, commenting how it goes "above and beyond to protect the network for today and future generations". He spoke about the importance of canals for wellbeing and health, and also the role of the

Trust in maintaining major national infrastructure, including the role canals can play to mitigate flooding.

Wendy Morton MP spoke about how integral canals are to local communities and the tremendous work and progress that has been made by the Trust. Referencing the challenges ahead, she said the task of looking after the Trust's 2,000-mile network is a "shared endeavour. An endeavour which the government... has a vested interest in" and whose role must continue.

David Orr, chair of the Canal & River Trust, comments: "Thank you to all those MPs and peers who came to find out more about the nation's waterway infrastructure and the importance of keeping our canals alive.

"Our 250-year-old canal network is globally renowned living industrial heritage. Closer to home, it has a vital role to play, delivering a wide array of benefits to society, the environment, and the economy. Our network flows through almost half of the parliamentary constituencies in England and Wales so it is vitally important to share the possibilities the waterways offer with MPs and peers, and to demonstrate the difference the Trust is making as a partner to government in the lives of millions of people.

"However, the significant benefits our canals offer come at a cost. Faced with growing impacts from storms, floods and droughts worsened by climate change, our historic network is vulnerable, and the cost of keeping it safe is rising year on year. We believe that, by continuing appropriate levels of funding, government can help us keep the canal network open and safe, offering even more opportunities for this tremendous infrastructure to play a key role in 21st century Britain. I look forward to continuing the conversation."

FBW Weekend of Action

Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW) Declares a May Day Bank Holiday Weekend of Action

Several months after launching at the end of June 2023, FBW has created an impressive coalition of member organisations totalling well over one hundred, representing hundreds of thousands of users and supporters of inland waterways. A public petition has attracted close to 50,000 signatures.

Three well-reported Campaign Cruises in Birmingham, Gloucester and past the Palace of Westminster on the Thames have substantially raised awareness of the challenges facing our canals and rivers and the need for action.

The plans for 2024 include an important weekend of action over the May Day Bank Holiday weekend (4 to 6 May 2024) to highlight the impact of insufficient funding for Britain's 5,000 miles of inland waterways.

The weekend of action is planned to take place across the country on waterways managed by different inland navigation authorities. It will coincide with IWA's annual Canalway Cavalcade at Little Venice in London, which this year will be themed around Fund Britain's Waterways.

May Campaign cruise

Boaters attending Cavalcade are invited to join a Campaign Cruise past the Houses of Parliament on Wednesday 8 May, as the culmination of the weekend of action.

Parliamentarians will be encouraged to view the event and express their support for the continued maintenance of the waterways to

enable them to keep on delivering economic, health, environmental and well-being benefits.

It is hoped that activities taking place across the country over the weekend will attract local and national media attention, building up to the Westminster Cruise on 8 May for which FBW will be aiming for national coverage.

Is there a boating group local to you that could help?

FBW are looking for local groups to organise events during the weekend of action to spread the word that waterways need to be properly funded to stop them from falling into decline. Events can be as simple as a few boats gathered together at a "public" location where flyers can be handed out and people be encouraged to sign the FBW petition or get more involved.

If you or your organisation could arrange an event over the weekend, please contact Hazel Owen by email on hazelowen.awcc@outlook.com or by phone at 07929 204811. Please also contact Hazel if you can help promote the FBW cause at any events that you are involved in throughout the year.

For further information about Fund Britain's Waterways contact: info@fundbritainswaterways.org.uk



FUND BRITAIN'S WATERWAYS

FBW brings together a wide range of organisations with the sole purpose of campaigning collectively for an increase in government funding of Britain's inland waterways to avert their decline, and to promote awareness of the huge economic, environmental and social well-being value they provide. Established in June 2023, it already has over 100 members representing hundreds of thousands of users and supporters of inland waterways.

Environment Agency News

Rachael McFarlane has been appointed for a year to job share with Omoniyi Green as Navigation Manager (backfilling for Jo Scully).

Rachael has been with the Environment Agency since 2006 where she began work as a Biodiversity Officer.

This job share brings together many of the things Rachael loves; rivers, physical and human geography and recreation in the outdoors (she is a cold-water swimmer and was a keen kayaker), looking forward to learning about Navigation and working with stakeholders.

Navigation has been working closely with colleagues internally to drive forward the Navigation Business Plan with a focus on the progression of navigation priorities for the coming year; Finances (exploring alternative funding sources), Enforcement (influencing government to change legislation and bylaws) and Participation and Benefits data collection.

The winter period is proving to be challenging with the wide scale flooding just after the December festivities and the proceeding storms taking place at the busiest time of the Navigation Capital programme, but positive outcomes have been delivered for Navigation.

The EA are continuing work with national stakeholders, and certainly realising the benefits of a new engagement model. The EA has been busy over the last few months carrying out more 1:1 meetings with national organisations that are members of the National Waterways Forum (NWF). A broad range of in-

terest areas have been covered and are helping EA to understand the subjects that are most important to boating and non-boating customers alike.

The next meeting of the NWF chaired by the Environment Agency's Board Member for Navigation, Robert Gould, is on 25th April.

The EA are progressing the formation of the first National Waterways Technical Group (NWTG), which will be looking at nationally consistent boat identification, visitor registration charges and EA Participation Strategy & Access.

When the project briefs for these groups are set the EA will be contacting the stakeholder representatives who have offered to support EA by sharing their relevant skill and expertise as group members.

Through the EA's leading membership of the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities (AINA), it aims to take a collaborative approach to many of the topics and challenges we are all facing. AINA has an ambitious business plan covering work of both strategic and operational importance; and the EA is playing a full part in its delivery, through a number of working groups alongside colleagues from the Canal & River Trust, the Broads Authority, Waterways Ireland, Scottish Canals and many smaller authorities.

Current priorities include: Climate change and Net Zero, development of model byelaws for inland waterways, growth in residential use of inland waterways, reviewing the Inland Waters Small Passenger Boat Code, Hire Boat Code compliance verification and enforcement,

guidance for the sustainable management of dredged material from inland waterways and developing a navigation authority approach to asset maintenance based on common headline principles.

The EA monitors registration numbers throughout the year and compares these with the previous year. They also compare with 2019 as the last pre-COVID registration year.

The table below shows an increase in 'powered annual' registrations to the end of December 2023 of 125 compared to the same period for 2022. Although this is positive news when compared to 2019, numbers are down by 1303. This means registration numbers have not yet returned to pre-COVID levels which has an impact on overall income and funding for the Navigation service.

Waterway	Registrations to end Dec 2019	Registrations to end Dec 2022	Registrations to end Dec 2023	Change 2022 -2023	Change 2019 - 2023
Thames	8204	7318	7344	+26	-860
Anglian	4232	3777	3855	+78	-377
Medway	697	610	631	+21	-66
Total	13,133	11,705	11,830	+125	-1303

Festivals



Gnosall C-Fest 2024 (19-21 July)

- Trading craft boats
- More than five bands over three days at our great pubs
- Historic working boats
- Local canal societies
- Gnosall canal history exhibition
- Public boat trips.

More details and boat booking cfest.gnosall@gmail.com

Bringing to life the Venice of the Midlands

Boat and trade entries are now being invited for the Tipton Canal & Community Festival on 21-22 September 2024.

free-4210357.webador.co.uk/boat-trade-entries




Come to our 3-day community festival along Gnosall's beautiful canal

Take a boat trip from the festival garden
Visit the floating market
Enjoy our local pubs - live music and refreshments
Learn about local canals and their history
View historic working boats

19-21 July 2024

Organised by
Gnosall Towpath Restoration
www.gnosallcanalfestival.co.uk




Around the Regions

Avon and Severn Helen Hutt



Following four severe flood events in five months, the river has at last dropped into green and amber levels. However, the navigation has been significantly affected and several locks - Barton, Harvington, Evesham, Pershore and Nafford - are currently impassable for a variety of reasons. Tewkesbury lock re-opened on 8th March following repairs to the control panel following submersion.

Binton Bridge remains closed, due to bridge repairs carried out by the highway authority, and the opening date will be confirmed following assessment of the effect of delays due to flooding. Evesham and Pershore pump out units are currently inoperable due to damage caused by submersion.

All lock sides and moorings are covered with silt and debris and parts of the navigation channel may have large debris and be silted up and potentially unsafe to navigate, so Avon Navigation Trust is advising that navigation is not currently possible. If you must move for some reason, before you set off please ring 0300 999 2010 to check the latest state of the navigation and log your passage.

River Trent Nick Roberts



CRT's latest stoppage update now supports the guidance that you will require the Cranfleet Gauge to display "Your draft plus 1m" to get through Barton Island silted area.

That level for a 0.8m draft is still likely to be "YELLOW" on the CRT "Strong Stream Warning" system which applies even when no silting is present. It is also not far below 2.0m

when the system goes to RED - When the Cranfleet Floodgate is closed preventing passage above Cranfleet anyway....

For latest information: canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/boating/notices-and-stoppages/water-level-and-strong-stream-warnings

Written Answers - Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Inland Waterways and Rivers: Dredging

On 12th March 2024 the Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham asked His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the effectiveness of dredging rivers and waterways while balancing environmental and habitat considerations and, in particular, what assessment they have made of how effective this would be for the River Trent.

Lord Douglas-Miller, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs responded:

The Environment Agency undertakes dredging (for more information see the Environment Agency Blog on GOV.UK) to manage flood risk where it is technically effective, does not significantly increase flood risk for others downstream, and is environmentally acceptable. The effectiveness of such work in managing flood risk varies substantially from site to site. The Environment Agency makes a local assessment working in close consultation with local communities.

Historical records and modelling show that in some locations dredging can increase erosion and flood risk for communities downstream and damage wildlife and ecosystems. The Water Environment Regulations 2017 requires Risk Management Authorities to consider the impact of dredging on the ecological health of rivers but does not prevent dredging where it effectively protects people and property.

Along the River Trent, dredging is not cost effective as it would only provide a temporary and minimal increase in capacity as natural processes would cause silt to return and accumulate quickly. Additionally, there is the potential for negative impacts on the ecosystem if dredging is carried out. Many communities along the river Trent are well protected through other means such as flood defences and other river maintenance activities which are more viable and cost effective in the long term.



Cotswold Canals Trust

A note from David Hagg

I am delighted to join the Trust as its non-executive Chair and become a member of the board of trustees. As a local resident, I've seen and benefited from the great work carried out by the Cotswold Canals Trust and have always been impressed with the 'can do' culture, energy and enthusiasm of the charity and its volunteers.

Canals are not new to me. During my time as Stroud District Council's Chief Executive, I was involved with the award-winning Phase 1A restoration work, and the Council's partnership with CCT continues today. For ten years I chaired one of the Canal & River Trust's advisory boards, representing the region on the charity's national council and I currently chair the Cotswold Canals Partnership Board.

There is an ambitious programme of future restoration work ahead of us along both the eastern and western stretches and no doubt there will be a call-out for new volunteers as the work gathers momentum. Likewise, we will be looking to broaden the membership, with a particular focus on young people and families and the Trustees have already asked me to have a look at how we run as a charity and the best way to take the organisation forward.

Restoration Updates

2024 marks another year of opportunity for the Cotswold Canals Trust and the canals we aim to restore and operate. Although we are not far into the new year, a lot of positive change has come about.

First and foremost, the National Heritage Lottery Fund Board has recently agreed to continue supporting the Phase 1B canal restoration. The overall programme has had to be significantly revised due to long delays which included Covid lockdowns plus subsequent major cost increases due to the rampant inflation linked to the war in Ukraine among other things.

We have taken a significant step forward in our partnership with the Stroud Valleys Canal Company, our sister charity, with both sets of directors agreeing to work more closely together in future. Jointly, we will be looking how to best combine all canal restoration, maintenance, and operation within CCT, whilst retaining SVCC as the effective majority 'owner' of the canal itself and other associated assets, including towpaths, locks, bridges, benches, etc.

Another important result is that CCT have been asked to maximise our volunteer involvement wherever possible on Phase 1B, including the new canal section (Missing Mile) with 2 new locks. We are hoping that planning will be granted for this section by Spring 2024. We have therefore set up new CCT Project Teams to assess the considerable requirements and resources, not forgetting the need to also ensure Phase 1A is navigable with the necessary various moorings.



Diesel Fuel Sales by Boat – Whose Daft Idea Was That?

By Paul Monahan



Hold of Argo and Tadworth
Photo: Paul Monahan

I am not trying in this article to claim the glory – if there is any – for being first but trying rather to establish the historical record. If anyone can add to this history, I would be pleased to know.

Bulk carriage of oil and liquid fuel on the inland waterways started many years ago, with major carriers such as Whitakers on the Aire and Calder, various tanker traffics on the Severn, Claytons from Oldbury, 'Shell Fen' servicing pumping stations in the fens and Birmingham and Midland working the short-lived oil traffic to Aldridge. Retail sale of solid fuel from boats was also a well-established trade, although

less common than today. However, who originated the retail sale of diesel fuel directly boat-to-boat and when?

The idea of installing a relatively small tank, perhaps 6 to 7 hundred gallons, with a retail pump similar to that on a garage forecourt certainly appeared from somewhere. Extensive research suggests that it was the result of a late-night scheme devised, while suitably refreshed, in the 'Crown' on Broad Street in Birmingham. One member of the consortium (of two!) preferred the option of bulk sales for boatyards and canal-side houses, so went on to develop 'Silverline Fuels'. I pre-

ferred retail sales in the hope that there would be passing trade and that, although the amount sold per transaction would be less, the profit margin per gallon might be higher. I could also still use the boats for other work. At the time, I was running 'Tadworth' and 'Argo' from Gas Street Basin with occasional loads of coal, beer, boating-guide writers and other diverse cargoes.

We contacted a small fuel distributor near Digbeth, who was very helpful to us. I took delivery of the tank at the Sampson Road Depot thus probably being able to claim another record, for the last cargo loaded at Sampson Road. Fortunately, I was also able to buy an old but recently certified garage-style pump. It was calibrated in gallons, but it was still legal then (and more easily understood) to sell by the gallon. This was even though I had to buy in litres; the figure 4.5462 is forever in my memory. The pump was electrically driven, and I already had a small generator, so I was now in business.

When did all this happen? I installed the tank into Tadworth in early April 1988 and the first load of diesel fuel was delivered to me on 6th May 1988. Silverline Fuels loaded later that same month. Once established, trade was brisk. The advantage of a smaller tank soon became evident, as I could travel almost anywhere in the West Midlands within reach of the suppliers and did not need a conventional wharf from which to load. The tanker drivers soon became used to such strange delivery instructions as, "I'll meet you at the bridge on such a road, between x and y, just dangle the hose over the bridge." Thanks also to those pubs where the car parks made really good loading lengths – especially when the landlords never knew about it!



There are many tales to tell, but one in particular remains with me; moored one day at Lapworth, a boat approached with the steerer in some state of panic, shouting that his engine had failed. I was asked to look at the problem. He had run out of fuel! His delight (and generosity) was unmatched when he realised that he had just collided with a boat full of diesel for sale...

After some years, we wanted to move on (or, more exactly, off the boats) so sold the pair and business to a couple who operated them for a while on the Junction, apparently making an income from selling bulk supplies of dog food to the static boats moored below Cowley. I do not know exactly when they ceased trading, but many other boats have since followed in our wake, selling diesel fuel to grateful customers and keeping carrying alive on the cut.

'Tadworth', after a period of dereliction, has been expertly and carefully restored and is now operating as a part of the Jules' Fuels fleet, once again carrying fuel supplies to the boats. Regrettably, 'Argo' was cut in half and made into two short motor boats.

1988 May on Tadworth at Sampson Road
Photo: Paul Monahan

Twenty Years of Narrowboating and an Eye to the Future!

A point of view from a continuous cruiser
by **Mark Tittley**

Like many others my first experience of boating was hiring on the Llangollen Canal, in 2004 with my future wife Jill. This was our first full week's holiday together. Twenty years later we're now liveaboards on our Russell Newbery powered 70' narrow boat. So what changes have I noticed in the UK canal system and what of the future?

In truth during the first couple of years I was more concerned about learning how to boat than spending too much time worrying about the state of the system. In fact by and large everything seemed to work properly, locks worked, good BW facilities and canals suitably dredged. There certainly wasn't a good deal of discussion, unlike now, about whether canal X or Y had sufficient depth of water in it.

BW's operational approach was, I thought, on the whole proactive, not reactive as largely now seems to be the case under CRT regarding maintenance. One indicator is how many times in the summer CRT now has to respond reactively by closing the navigation in order to remove fallen trees, rather than proactively planning to remove or prune them back over the winter works period.

During the first few years of CRT, infrastructure improvement and maintenance was good to see. However, I did have some concerns about how the long term strategy for funding CRT would play out over

the next 10 to 20 years. Sadly those concerns have not proven to be ill founded. As we all know the core annual Government Grant underfunding to CRT is now acute and continues to grow alarmingly.

Many boaters now find themselves trying to moor up on massively overgrown and often unsafe lock landings, or trying to navigate unacceptably shallow canals, the Caldon a prime example. This has made me think about what's wrong with the current UK canal management and governance systems, plus what's not all that right with some aspects of what I will call CRT's 'critical friends' groups?

Does CRT see the maintenance of a navigable canal system as its core business? My guess is quite possibly not, because as a trust based organisation CRT is naturally driven by a desire to acquire as many funding streams as possible. However, a notable number don't directly have anything to do with maintaining a navigable system, for instance potential funding sources such as local authorities. Whilst they no doubt welcome the fact that a canal and the boats moving on it gives an area a sense of place and scene, they provide funds not for the maintenance of the navigation but the tarmacking of towpaths for the benefit of local residents, walkers, anglers and bikers (including unintended use by motor bikers and powered scooter riders). In addition CRT's senior



Pointing the way?

management team seem to have no real deep appreciation or background in the practical management of the canal system, let alone any real experience of boating. Whilst this management team's broader business and third sector background is welcome and important, if it contains no basic personal 'grass roots' experience of the canal system and boating, they won't have a really deep understanding or empathy of it.

It's easy to see why CRT might believe it to be a good idea to double the licence fees of boats that continuously cruise. By 'Custom and Practice', which often carries some weight in English Law, these boaters have for decades paid the same level of licence fees as mooring based boaters. Why should ccer's pay twice to use a canal and its rapidly diminishing facilities?

On the same line, whilst broad beam boats might seem an easy income stream target for CRT, what they seemingly fail to recognise is that people who live on broad beams often do so because it's currently their only means of buying a place to live. Add CRT's doubling up of licence fees to the existing mooring fees for broad beams, I can imagine in some years time the bottom falling out of the broad beam market.

On face value this is not a good long term strategic position for CRT

to take. By limiting the number of boats coming onto the system by making boating unaffordable, it might also be cynically said that this will make the closing of whole tracts of the system that bit easier. I might be paranoid, but think 'Dr Beeching'. In the 1960s, if British Rail wanted to close a profitable, much used line down, they withdrew profitable traffic from the line, instead running slow services that were timed to suit no one. They failed to carry out maintenance and delayed and cancelled trains became the unacceptable norm and as a result the line haemorrhaged passenger and goods traffic. If canals aren't dredged, off-side vegetation is allowed to reduce the width of the canal, lock moorings and locks are not maintained will lead to a system that is for the most part unnavigable with far fewer people wanting to try to. We can all draw up a list of likely potential candidates that in time CRT might feel it necessary to 'offer up' for closure, due to lack of funding.

I'm not losing sight of the fact that the real core issue is a rapidly decreasing annual grant from Government, with a continuing UK economic crisis and core services such as health and social services having first call on what funds are available, plus an increasing pressure on Government to broaden its defence spending.

So is CRT fit for purpose? To some degree I have to say no. It doesn't seem to manage its outsourced services very effectively related to maintenance and emergency repair activities, plus it doesn't seem strategically focussed upon how to obtain extra funding streams for maintaining infrastructure. One suggestion might be that CRT could promote and drive legislative change so that canalside developers would have to make an ongoing annual financial contribution towards maintenance of the canal alongside new housing or corporate development. As developers actively promote the benefits of a water front view, I don't think this an unreasonable idea.

What do I think CRT's 'critical friends' groups have and should be doing? Some of the larger groups have, until 2023, not done too much to hold CRT to account in respect of its long term funding strategy. Many of these groups didn't seem to have any real long term strategic planning, campaigning or lobbying for when the day came that CRT seriously started to run out of money. The Government funding regime set up at CRT's inception was always timetabled to be reviewed, most probably revised or ended, so the current funding crisis was extremely predictable. However, whilst I fully support the current national campaign for increased annual funding from Government, holding rallies outside the Houses of Parliament will not of itself be enough to change the Government's position.

It's my understanding that some groups have taken the view that CRT's consultation process relating to its future licensing regime and the substance of these proposals, are difficult to challenge legally. I would have thought that the consultation process and the subsequent licence fee changes should be sub-

ject to Judicial Review. If nothing else, aren't they potentially open to challenge on the grounds of previous custom and practice (particularly in respect of CRT's continuous cruiser proposals), and diversity and equality issues? I hope it's not too late to seek further legal council in this matter and I hope that this is something that one of the larger critical friend groups might wish to do.

Editor, NABO has already obtained legal advice that it would be very expensive to challenge the proposals with no guarantee of success.

My final question is, what if the nuclear option occurred and CRT ceased to exist? Drawing upon the 'Beeching' analogy again, the reason Beeching was appointed to the role of heavily trimming down the railways, was because an elected government didn't want to be held directly accountable for closing stations and railway lines; far better to have your front man doing the dirty work! Similarly, if CRT ceased to exist, responsibility for our canals and CRT managed rivers would revert back to government. This would no doubt lead to heated political debate on the floor of the House of Commons relating to waterways funding issues. When elected politicians and governments are directly responsible themselves for potentially removing or significantly reducing a national treasure and institution such as our waterways system, then government tends to support it, not kill it.

As we know people can have long memories when it comes to the ballot box.

Editor: The first Beeching report identified 2,363 stations and 5,000 miles (8,000 km) of railway line for closure, amounting to 55% of stations, 30% of route miles, and the loss of 67,700 British Rail jobs. The proposed cuts also failed to stem losses or improve public rural transport.

Canalotto

Ian Hutson

One thing that our Lords & Masters have proven to us over past years is that class, quality, decorum, and a sense of respek [sic] for history do not a significant portion occupy of the throbbing Corporate Psyche. We've seen our colours nailed not so much to the mast as angling, cycling, rambling, and some nebulous new-age sense of "wellness". Little good it has done us.

It's hearsay of course but I do hear even CRT say that the "chuggers", the ones selling Papal Favours – oops, I mean "wellness memberships" – to passing strangers, cost more than they bring in, even when using the most inventive of accounting techniques. So why not forget selling the warm and rosy glow that comes from helping to finance the continuation of the canal system for a load of freeloading smelly tax-deficient boaters (as most strangers see us) and sell instead the rosy warm glow that comes from holding a two-quid "half-sunken tyre" logo bedecked "Lucky Locks" Canalotto Ticket?

Everybody's doing it. It's impossible to be online socially without being bombarded with advertisements for lotteries to fund ex-forces personnel (a truly laudable cause) and doggy rescue centres (another truly laudable cause) and, lately, something called a "crowdfunder" to pay for the upkeep of a certain World Heritage Aqueduct. Far smaller ventures than we are in on the act, flogging tickets to win restored Mk.II Jaguars, wads of used notes, and/or holidays in Ibeefa, in-nit.

The Canal Company is not above filthy-fingered grasping for groats, as we've seen demonstrated recently

with the satanically-inspired wheeze of a quarter surcharge aimed at less than a sixth of boats and all in the matter of the licence - a matter that we are sometimes officially told as scoff and scold brings in little more than a tenth of CRT's due. If we can freeze a few pensioners off the canals for the sake of a quarter of a sixth of a tenth then surely we're not above a branded lottery to raise money, raise the profile, and convert the chuggers from a cost-centre to a profit-centre in one fell swoop? It's tacky and cheap and nasty but it would thus connect rather well with the current zeitgeist which is also tacky and cheap and nasty.

It's hearsay again, but how often do we hear CRT say that there are eight hundred million "visits" (presumably by non-boaters) to the canals every four seconds or each solar month or some such (I forget the minutiae of this month's claims). Flog tickets on the towpath, flog tickets on the interwebnet; there's folding money to be had, and sure certain one thing that our Lords & Masters could successfully wring out of Charles the III'rds Government would be a gaming licence. Easy peasy lemon squeezy, no cost to the Exchequer, just the rubber stamp of a Sybil Serpent in Whitehall.

Of course, the real trick would be to then not spend the moolah on buying in more management, or contracting out more real work... That, I think, would be the only truly difficult part of the endeavour.



Diary of a Gongoozler 4

by Steve Teratsia



DIARY OF A GONGOOZLER

Jasper



Now I absolutely adore doggos, and have had several over the years. My very favourite was an Irish Setter named Jasper whom I got from a rescue centre in the early 1980's.

He was the most loving, friendly, passive creature on God's Earth, but unfortunately he had one fatal flaw. He was utterly useless at doing dog things, suffice to say that if you were to throw a stick for him, he'd eventually come happily trotting back with someone's garden gnome.

His other party piece was running up behind random strangers,

and then nestle his snout directly into their crotch. I guess it was just his way of greeting people, but I wish at times that he'd have just learned to say hello and shake hands instead.

Oh, yet another of his talents was escaping the garden and going into town. I once had to retrieve him from a posh shop that sold fur coats, after the owner phoned me to say that he'd walked in and promptly laid himself down in the shop window display for an afternoon siesta.

He also learned that if he made his way to the local Police Station at the right time, he'd melt the hearts of WPC's and they'd often buy him fish and chips. Being smart in that respect he became quite the fixture there to the point that I and West Midlands Police had a sort of 'joint custody' of the little buggler for some weeks until I told them to stop feeding him, and made my garden a little more escape proof.

A 'special' dog in every respect and I've not had another since.

"What's this to do with canals?" I hear you mutter.

Well, on my photographic/fishing lurks around the waterways I come across many dogs and owners, and thought I'd share a few experiences.

The first one to spring to mind is the day some years ago when I was fishing for pike on the Severn near Worcester. Two somewhat boisterous cocker spaniels decided to make an escape from their owner and have a wild party at my expense.

Within seconds they had totally decimated my carefully arranged fishing gear, but worse still managed to grab hold of my bait container

which contained four semi frozen small mackerel, and a couple of her- ring that had gone well past their sell by date and had an odour that would make anyone wretch.

It didn't seem to bother this pair of thugs, they wolfed the lot down before I even realised what was go- ing on. The owner of these dogs eventually appeared and apologised profusely... But I often wonder if he ended up with a hefty vet's bill for the 'upset tummies' that these dogs must surely have had once the rot- ting fish had been digested.

More recently, I was ambling along the Staffs & Worcs near Gailey when what looked like a 12 stone Great Dane being walked by an 8 stone lady decided he wanted to in- troduce himself to me.

Without warning, this over- friendly monster was up on his back legs and resting a paw on each of my shoulders. Not sure if it was my ir- resistible charm or the aftershave that I was using but he seemed to have an irresistible urge to 'French Kiss' me.

I was absolutely drenched in fes- toons of dog snot, and as it was a bit of a manky day my new wax jacket and jeans were plastered in mud. I had planned to have a pub lunch on the way home, but would have likely been chucked out of the local Toby Inn for constituting a health hazard.

The only really negative expe- rience though was a Jack Russell Terrier that took exception to my camera tripod and decided to try to topple it while it had a 500 quid camera attached. The owner thought it was hilarious until he saw the look on my face and my umbrella point- ing directly at his.

And you all thought photography was a safe, serene hobby? I wouldn't have it any other way though if I'm honest!

Stay safe everyone, and hope to catch you (and your dogs!) soon.



Guard Duty

Bradley Canal Restoration Society annual rally, Saturday 15th June at CRT Bradley Workshops. This is now becoming an annual event that helps promote their restoration plans and gets a heavy local involvement with the surrounding community. BCRS would naturally appreciate support, please let them know if you are able to assist at the event.

Booking details: bradleycanal.co.uk



Last year's boaters enjoying the sunshine

Rewind

Issue No 2 2009

Howard Anguish reviews NABO News from 15 years ago.

INLAND NAVIGATION ISSUES, NEWS, AND VIEWS



BW Announce the 2009 leisure mooring fees were to increase by an average of 6.1% with commensurate rises in residential fees with no prior notice given to NABO despite promises that this would happen. It seems that inflation busting increases were on the go even as early as 2009.

Council Member John Slee announced that he has set up the first NABO survey Cost of Boating Survey in 2009 so Council can keep an eye on the cost of boating for members. It will give an idea of running costs such as fuel, gas, coal and routine coats together with brief details of more major costs – ideally with an idea of the same costs in the previous year.

BW Executive Directors to forgo bonuses in 2009. Towpath Talk reports that, *'due to the economic down-turn, the money for director's bonuses is now to be spent on network maintenance. One member comments "It's the most decent thing I've ever known BW to do", but another asks, "Isn't it just a face saver to attempt some damage limitation to the deep embarrassment of being forced to publicise what little they get their bonuses for in the first place?"*

Announced as **"A long awaited improvement to member services"** details of the on-line publication of NABO News were set out as a milestone in services to members, something we now take as an extremely valuable and necessary part of services provided to NABO Members as part of the membership and it is difficult to think how we managed in earlier days.

Chairman David Fletcher high-

lights the *"shocking increase in mooring costs," miles above inflation*" and also the ongoing dissatisfaction among boating groups against the mooring auctions, recently proposed by British Waterways, a change recently imposed despite near universal objections from boating representative groups, including NABO.

Towpath changes. David also thanks those members who have sent to Council details of correspondence they have had with BW especially issues concerning changes which BW carry out to towpaths and the inconsistencies vary from region to region.

This edition welcomes the **latest member to join Council**, John Slee as Continuous Cruising representative, a very welcome addition to Council and a position which I think was a first for Nabo mentions that he had a varied career over the years ranging from computer programming and analysis, running an ice cream parlour in Newquay and as a C of E Parish Priest. I'll leave readers to decide which career path was most useful to a Council Member! Certainly, in the years following his arrival John worked wonders behind the scenes updating and tweaking NABO's computer and online systems and he certainly got me out of a hole on many an occasion.

Crystal Ball time. Part of a member's letter about boating in the future - *"network fragmented into short sections by 'Closed until further notice' due to parts of the system collapsing, breaching or becoming unsafe, leaving the boater with short lengths of waterway to sail on."*

NABO News back issues are available online at nabo.org.uk/nabo-news-back-copies/

Letters to the Editor

Opinions expressed here are independent of NABO policy and statements made have not been verified as accurate.

I fear that Michael Matheson's knowledge of the events leading to the Millennium Link project and the history of British Waterways is sadly lacking!

The project was initiated by British Waterways (Scotland), in particular by the then chairman, Jim Stirling, aided by engineer George Ballinger, and with the enthusiastic support of the rest of British Waterways. It had always been British Waterways' intention to reopen the lowland canals, even though it might take 50 years or more. To state that British Waterways sat in the background and did little but manage a bit of the infrastructure is inaccurate.

The bid for Millennium funding was enthusiastically supported by SIWA (Scottish Inland Waterways Association, (now sadly defunct), local canal societies, the largest being the Forth and Clyde Canal Society and the Linlithgow Union Canal Society, and most of the local authorities along the route. Another keen supporter was Ronnie Rusack, who owned the Bridge Inn at Ratho, and ran dinner cruises to

the Almond Aqueduct. The initial bid failed as the Millennium Commission thought that it did not demonstrate sufficient public support, but, following a weekend when canal societies gathered several thousand signatures to a petition, a second bid was successful, although for a reduced amount.

When CaRT was set up in 2012, assets in England and Wales were transferred from British Waterways to the Canal and River Trust. The remainder, the Scottish assets, stayed with British Waterways, who now trade as Scottish Canals. Campbell Christie, who was on the board of Scottish Enterprise and British Waterways, was appointed chair of British Waterways(Scotland). The Falkirk Wheel had been open for a decade at that point. Campbell Christie was a great supporter of the canals, and was very keen to use them as an aid to local regeneration and development. It is, perhaps, a pity that subsequent chairpersons have been neither canal engineers, nor had Campbell Christie's vision!

Iain Street

I name this boat ...

If you have spotted a boat name while cruising that made you smile, please send a photo to the editor.



Terence Stamp fan?



For the Non-Welsh speakers

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